

Symbolae Osloenses 84, 2010

DIALECTIC OF EROS AND MYTH OF THE SOUL IN PLATO'S *PHAEDRUS*

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In this paper, I question a widespread reading of a passage in the last part of the *Phaedrus* dealing with the science of dialectic. According to this reading, the passage announces a new method peculiar to the later Plato aiming at defining natural kinds. I show that the *Phaedrus* itself does not support such a reading. As an alternative reading, I suggest that the science of dialectic, as discussed in the passage, must be seen as dealing primarily with philosophical rhetoric and knowledge of human souls.

Psychês peirata iôn ouk an exeuroio, pasan epiporeuomenos hodon; houo bathyn logon
echei

-Herclitus, Fr. 45

As is well known the question of the unity of Plato's *Phaedrus* is a difficult one. The first part of the dialogue seems preoccupied with the topic of *eros*, the second with rhetoric and *logos*. Perhaps in some way uniting these parts, we find the overall question of beauty.¹ In addition to these broader topics, the question of *sophrosyne* and *hybris* looms large, not only through the motive of self-knowledge, which Socrates brings into the dialogue from the very beginning (229e), but also through the notion of *eros*, defined in Socrates' first speech as a kind of desire, *epithymia tis*, set over against acquired opinion or judgement (237d).² We are also confronted with the themes of the immortality of the soul, the relationship between the parts of the soul, of the ecstatic vision of the eternal forms, of the science of dialectic and its relationship to ordinary rhetoric as well as of the question how the written and the spoken word relate to each other. If the *Phaedrus* is to be regarded as a living animal, it would seem to resemble the howling, many-headed typhoon, which Socrates does not know whether he resembles, far more than the simpler creature with a "share in a divine ... nature" (230a) which he hopes to be like.

I will not try to tackle this thorny issue here. Instead, I will focus on a – perhaps simpler – problem pertaining to unity. In an often quoted passage in the last part of the dialogue, 265d-266b, where Socrates describes the art of dialectic, the question of unity and its relation to plurality is made into an explicit theme. In this paper, I wish to ask what the point of the passage is. More precisely, I wish to address the problem how one can understand Socrates' description of dialectic

in the last part of the *Phaedrus* if one focuses on what it is meant to spell out in the context in which it is introduced.

In the first part of this paper, I will sketch what I take to be a fairly widespread understanding of the passage, namely that it is the first announcement of a new method which Plato developed in the last period of his work, consisting in conceptual analysis through division of genera (*genē*) into species (*eidē*) by means of *differentia specifica*. By comparing this understanding with the way Socrates' speeches in the first part of the dialogue are composed, since this is what the passage in question purports to tell us something about, I will try to show why I do not find it plausible. In the second part of the paper I shall therefore proceed to take a closer look at Socrates' second speech, since I believe that the content of it, although 'mythical' rather than 'logical', is of great importance for Socrates' endeavour to reach an understanding of the nature of *eros*. Since the understanding of *eros* seems to be what dialectic is supposed to deliver, I will go on to suggest how one can make a possible connection between what is said about dialectic in the 265d-266b passage and what we are told about soul in the great myth. In the final part of my paper, I will try to make this suggested connection more plausible by linking the discussion of rhetoric and dialectic in the second part of the dialogue with the myth of the soul found in Socrates' second speech. This will support my suggestion of regarding dialectic as connected with 'myths of the soul' but it will leave us with some paradoxes which are connected with the theme of self-knowledge.

I

Let us turn to the passage dealing with dialectic in the *Phaedrus*. The passage is not very long but rather complex. It is embedded in a larger discussion of the difference between good and bad writing as well as speaking (*to mē kalōs legein te kai graphein*; 258d), a question which is raised due to Phaedrus' concern that Socrates, in his second speech on *eros*, might have outdone Lysias as a speech-writer. The passage describes a procedure carried out in two steps:

"The first consists in seeing together (*synorōnta*) things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them into one kind (*mian idean*), so that by defining each thing we can make clear the subject of any instruction we wish to give." (265d) Socrates goes on to illustrate this step by saying that this is what his previous speeches did by defining love, thereby making the speeches, if not true, then at least able to proceed smoothly and consistently with themselves.

The second step is "to be able to cut up each kind according to its species [*eidē*] along its natural joints, and to try not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do." (265e) This second step Socrates also illustrates by referring to what his

previous speeches did, namely that, once they had established “unsoundness of mind to be by nature one single kind”, they proceeded to split up mental derangement, thereby arriving at two kinds of love, one left-handed, as it were, the other right-handed.

Such divisions and collections, Socrates goes on to explain, is something he loves, since they make him able to think and to speak, and the practitioners of such a procedure are, he suggests, best called dialecticians (266b-c). So what is this dialectical ability? As we can see, both steps are preoccupied with forms or types, *ideai* and *eidē*, collecting scattered things towards one form, and then dividing this form according to other forms. I believe Hackforth's comment on the passage still captures fairly well how many interpreters read it: “It is in this section that Plato for the first time formally expounds that philosophical method – the method of dialectic – which from now onwards becomes so prominent in his thought, especially in the *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus*... here we have Plato's first announcement of a new discovery to which he attaches the highest importance.”³

Hackforth goes on to assert (p.136) that this new method cannot be compared with what is said about dialectic in the *Republic*. The novelty consists in not trying to deduce all knowledge and reality from a highest principle, that is, the idea of the good. Dialectic is now rather a “piecemeal approach to knowledge” which consists “in a mapping out of one field after another by classification *per genera et species*”.⁴ This new method is often supposed to be connected with a change in Plato's conception of the ideas, in particular as regards their interrelatedness. However commentators conceive of the ontological status of the ideas in the later dialogues, it seems fair to say that the majority take it for granted that Plato's new method is supposed to define something by placing it, to quote from Notomi's recent commentary on the *Sophist* “in the network or relationship between kinds”,⁵ which, to quote another recent commentary on the same dialogue “presupposes that notions or concepts, *Begriffe*, are species and kinds that are superordinate and subordinate to each other”.⁶ From Hackforth's comment to the passage it is clear that he regards it as of a programmatic kind, announcing a new method of dialectic which is primarily applied in later works, a view which seems to be shared by many other scholars.

Although I do not doubt that it can be fruitful to see the passage in connection with other late dialogues where the science of dialectic is discussed, I have two reasons for not doing this here. My first reason is purely pragmatic. The *Phaedrus* passage does indeed seem to have a close resemblance to two other methodological passages, namely 253a-e in the *Sophist* and 14c-18d in the *Philebus*,⁷ and these passages may in turn be regarded as closely connected with the divisions that are performed in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Nevertheless, it is quite difficult to determine on the one hand what these methodological passages are meant to

spell out,⁸ and on the other how they are related to the divisions found in the dialogues. Thus, if the comparison between the *Phaedrus* and these other dialogues is to be successful, I take it that a serious interpretation of all these dialogues is needed, which is obviously not possible in this paper.

My second reason for not wanting to bring in other dialogues here is of a methodological character. The general tendency of much recent scholarship on Plato is to regard Platonic dialogues as self-contained unities. If one follows this trend, a difficult passage in any dialogue should ideally be explained by the specific context in which it is found, not by reference to other dialogues, which is what I will try to do. It may turn out that the result of doing this will not be fully satisfying, and this may in turn explain why commentators tend to read the *Phaedrus* passage in light of other dialogues rather than in light of the *Phaedrus* itself.

If we look at the passage 265c-d, which precedes the discussion of the two steps involved in dialectic, we see that Socrates claims that the two speeches he has given on the subject of *eros* contained two forms (*dyoin eidoin*), the power (*dynamis*) of which it would be good to grasp through an art, a *technē*. These two forms are what he then describes as the twofold procedure of collection and division, and dialectic is supposedly the art which captures the power of these activities. As regards the content of his two speeches, Socrates somewhat surprisingly claims that it was all said playfully or by way of a joke, a *paidia*. How are we to understand this remark?

According to Ernst Heitsch, Socrates' comment signals that it is the methodological prerequisites of the two speeches that are sanctioned as true, not the "mythological exposition built upon their basis."⁹ These prerequisites are, according to Heitsch, a "particular way of carrying out conceptual analysis." Heitsch seems to be right in pointing out that Socrates suggests that the two speeches, seen together and from a more formal perspective, are meant to illustrate the procedure characteristic of dialectic. He also seems to be right in claiming that the illustrations Socrates gives of each of the two steps of dialectical reasoning in the passage 265d-266b give the impression that collection and division is to be found in the way that the two speeches define *eros*, i.e. in the way they carry out "conceptual analysis", as Heitsch puts it. If he is also right that the contents of the speeches are not important in this regard, it must be the divisions and collections defining *eros* which illustrate what dialectic is, and these can be regarded wholly apart from, for instance, what is said (mythically) about the soul. So let us look at how the two speeches actually define *eros*.

At the beginning of the first speech, we find a preliminary definition of *eros*, namely that it is a kind of desire (*epythimia*); as Socrates claims at 265d, this definition is what enabled the speech to proceed in good order. Interestingly, in the first speech the definition follows directly upon Socrates' claim that

unless one knows what one is deliberating about, one will miss, *harmatanein*, one's target; most people, he goes on to say, do not know that they are ignorant of the essence or nature, the *ousia*, of what they talk about, which explains why they are often misled (237b-c).¹⁰ But once Socrates has stated this – to my mind – sound, Socratic principle,¹¹ which he repeats in the second half of the dialogue (cf. 263a-c, 265d), he immediately goes on to claim that “everybody plainly knows” that “love is some kind of desire”; this ‘fact’, taken together with the commonsensical notion that desire stands in opposition to “acquired judgement that pursues what is best” makes the basis for the entire speech. No attempt is made at determining whether what everybody knows actually corresponds with the nature of *eros*.

This initial determination of *eros* is then followed by something that may look like a procedure of division. At 238a Socrates claims that desire, when in command of a person, leads to *hybris*, and that the forms of *hybris* are as many as the objects of desire. When the object of desire is beauty, the name we have to give this kind of *hybris* is *eros*.

In the first speech, we thus seem to have a simultaneous and perhaps somewhat circular procedure of division and collection: *eros* is first defined as a kind of *epithymia*, and the division of *epithymia* according to its different objects again leads to a definition of *eros*. That *eros* is a *hybristic* desire for beauty is, as Socrates with veiled head claims, “a definition of the subject” of the discussion, stating what *eros* “really is” (238d-e). We thus see that, although Socrates' first speech clearly states that one must come to an agreement about the nature or essence of the subject one wishes to discuss instead of following ordinary belief about it, its apparently technical procedure does nothing else than spell out the content of ordinary belief. This problem cannot be explained away simply by saying that Socrates isn't speaking in his own name. It is true that his definition merely seems to echo Lysias' speech (cf. 231d), but nevertheless the speech is supposedly meant to illustrate a specific method.

We may wonder if the picture is any better in the second speech. Here *eros* is no longer defined as *epithymia*, but rather as madness, *mania*. But since the first speech has suggested that the non-lover, free from desire, is in control of himself, thereby being sound-minded, that is *sōphrōn*, in opposition to the lover who is mad (cf. 241a), the new definition of *eros* can be seen as an elaboration of the same common opinion spelled out in the first speech. In fact, if we take it that way we can make sense of Socrates' later claim that both speeches defined *eros* as a type of madness (265a). Having first defined *eros* as a kind of madness, the second speech goes on to divide the kinds of madness, first by splitting madness into ordinary madness, “produced by human illness” as Socrates later specifies (also at 265a), and another type of madness that is god-induced, then by dividing divine madness into kinds, where (good) *eros* is then proclaimed, at

249d, to be a fourth kind of *mania*. As regards the technical procedure of division and collection, the second speech seems to be as circular as the first: *eros* is first defined as madness and a specific kind of madness is then said to be *eros*. We may well wonder if collection and division in the two speeches is not simply a complicated way of postulating something about *eros*, intended to blur the fact that no conceptual analysis is carried out at all.

Of course, one could object that when Socrates at 264e-266a claims that the two speeches together defined two separate kinds of *eros*, one left-handed, the other right-handed, he is saying that only the two speeches *taken as one* illustrate the method of collection and division. The two speeches would then exemplify the dialectician's ability to distinguish different forms of something that to the ordinary eye might look identical, by differentiating bad from good *eros*.¹² The problem with this objection is that the impression of dialectic as a kind of activity revealing the essence of something or, to use Heitsch's expression, as a method of conceptual analysis, does not get much better if we do that. Seen as one, the two speeches together define *eros* as a kind of madness, splits madness in two, one ordinary, another divine. The first speech then goes on to deal with the first type of madness, the other with the other. In effect, we get a definition of two kinds of *eros*, one brute, the other divine or philosophical. That this division in itself does not require a new, profound way of carrying out conceptual analysis can be seen from the speeches of Pausanias and Eryximachos in the *Symposium*.

In other words, we may seriously wonder whether the method of collection and division teaches us anything new about *eros* at all. If we disregard the contents of the two speeches and only focus on the formal aspects of the definitions, the method seems simply to consist in focusing on a wider or broader term that people generally believe includes what you want to define, and then 'dividing' this general class into sub-classes, pointing out that what you want to define is one of them. This may be adequate for a nominal definition, but it surely seems a rather unconvincing procedure for arriving at real definitions. If the method of dialectic only brings to light what most people already know or believe, it seems to be nothing more than a (rather crude) device by which one is able to give a speech a clearly stated starting-point.

To me, this seems a less than attractive result, if only due to the fact that Socrates declares dialectic to be the foundation of true rhetoric, described as soul-guidance (*psychagōgia*) at 261a and 271d, and that he will follow anyone able to carry out dialectical divisions "as if he were a god" (266b-c). If true rhetoric, that is, soul-guidance, is dialectic or at least founded on dialectic, and if dialectic is the knowledge possessed by the philosopher, as the *Phaedrus* (and other dialogues as well) certainly seem to suggest (cf. 261a), we should expect that dialectic is more than the ability to make nominal definitions. We would seem justified in supposing that it somehow should lead to a real understanding of the essence or nature of

what it contemplates and not stay content with spelling out the opinions that most people have about the matter in question. Of course, I do not mean to say that common opinions, *doxai*, have no role to play in the endeavour to reach such an understanding,¹³ but merely that if the procedure of 'collections' and 'divisions' does not contain – or is not connected with – a critical way of testing whether common opinion is true or not, such a procedure seems to be of little value to a Socratic notion of philosophy.

On the other hand, I readily admit that my interpretation of the text so far does not seem fair to the text. Socrates' speeches contain much more than the simple 'collections' and 'divisions' I have tried to extrapolate from them. In fact, the interpretation given so far seems to reduce Socrates' attempt to define *eros* to a parody, and that in a rather violently way. Indeed, it does. And this is my point. If we follow Socrates' suggestion in the short passage on dialectic and focus merely on the formal or 'analytical' steps of division and collection as what is of importance while disregarding the content of the speeches, we lose the reason for taking the formal elements serious at the same time. For I believe that what I have presented until now is all that can reasonably be described as formal steps of division and collection pertaining to the notion of *eros* that one can find in the two speeches. If one looks at these steps on their own, without regard for what they divide, they seem to be of little interest.

It is therefore worthwhile to point out the – perhaps simple – fact that Socrates didn't say that the content of his speeches was irrelevant, merely that it was playful. Why should what is said playfully not be worth taking seriously? In the *Statesman*, for instance, at 268d, we find the great myth of the reversed cosmos, which helps correcting the – at that point – shipwrecked procedure of dialectical divisions, and this myth is explicitly referred to as a joke or play. In general, Plato is a humorous writer, a fact which should be taken quite seriously.¹⁴ Perhaps it would be better to take a closer look at some of the contents¹⁵ of Socrates' speeches then, after all, especially the second.¹⁶

II

I have already noted that Socrates began his first speech by demanding that the interlocutors in any conversation should reach a common definition of the essence, the *ousia*, of what they are discussing (237b-c). Apparently, neither the first nor the second speech reaches any such definition of *eros* through collection or division. Instead, what this procedure seems to do is to spell out different *doxai* about *eros*. But in the second speech, at 245c, Socrates tries to define the *ousia*, not of *eros* (or, as we shall see, not directly of *eros*), but of the soul. Moreover, he states that it is exactly in order to show that *eros* is not a mischievous kind of madness,

but indeed god-given, that it is necessary to say what the essence of the soul is by “examining what it does and what is done to it”. This echoes his former demand at 237c8-9 of examining what *eros* is (*ti pot’estin*) as well as what power (*dynamis*) it has. If the division of divine madness into different kinds is to save *eros* from condemnation, an investigation of soul is apparently necessary.

It is probably this investigation of soul, its nature and form, its doings and sufferings that Socrates later describes as being playful. At the end of the palinode, at 257a, he excuses himself for having used somewhat poetical words. At 253c7 he refers to his description of the soul as a hybrid creature, consisting of a charioteer and a couple of horses that have grown together into a unity, as a myth. His proof that *eros* is god-given madness will not, he claims at 245c, convince the clever, only the wise.

Let me pause on this last point a short while. Such a clever person, a *deinos*, is perhaps like the one already mentioned by Socrates at 229d, namely the man whose main occupation was to deliver rational reductions of traditional mythological creatures such as the Hippocentaur, the Chimera and the Gorgon. Let us remember that Socrates there claimed to have no spare time for such activities, preoccupied as he is by finding out what he is. It now turns out that he does have time to tell myths of his own, in order to illustrate the nature of the human soul.

I believe it is plausible that the myth about the soul is somehow connected to Socrates' quest for self-knowledge and his initial uncertainty concerning what sort of creature he is. Presumably Socrates' quest for self-knowledge is not simply the question who the person Socrates is, but also of *what* he is, as a man. If what man is, considered as soul, is what Socrates tries to state in the myth contained in the palinode, it may seem that mythology, playfulness, poetic expression or whatever one wants to term it, is at the heart of the Socratic enterprise.

I will have to abstain from interpreting Socrates' difficult myth in any detail. Here, I will limit myself to the question: why does Socrates present us with a myth in the first place? And how does this affect the attempted definition of *eros*? The most obvious answer to the first question, which Socrates explicitly states at 246a3-6, is that it is not possible for a human being to state in detail what the form, the *idea*, of the human soul is. We may wonder why that is so.

I believe that an important reason for this is that the idea of the soul referred to in the passage cannot refer to a Platonic idea.¹⁷ If movement is what characterizes the soul, if self-movement is the “very essence” of soul, as is claimed in the argument for the immortality of the soul (245e) that prefigures the myth, the soul cannot be static, unchanging etc., i.e. it cannot possess the qualities that ideas are traditionally ascribed. Indeed, the picture we get from other dialogues as well is that the soul is not itself an idea but rather that which can relate to ideas.¹⁸ But if the soul is not an idea, but essentially movement and change, a movement which, in order to understand, relates itself, as much as possible, to

eternal ideas, this seems to explain why Socrates can at best tell what the form of the soul is *like*, not what it is, i.e. why the soul escapes strict definition and must be the subject of a mythical or poetic account. We may thus suppose that it is not only people who come to the doors of poetry who cannot rely solely on skill but needs the madness of the muses in addition, as Socrates claims 245a, but that this also applies to those who try to enter the halls of philosophy.

If this reasoning is sound, we get the following picture of how myth relates to the science of dialectic, as described in the *Phaedrus*. If the soul is not a Platonic idea, and if any serious definition of *eros* must include an investigation of the soul, since *eros* is a movement of the soul, as Socrates' second speech indicates (249d ff.), a definition of *eros* cannot be attained through a collection and division of Platonic ideas. The division of *eros* into good and bad *eros* receives its substance, so to speak, from the grand myth of the soul.

Let me try to give some suggestions why this reading appears attractive to me. The meagre result one gets if one focuses solely on what looks like divisions of natural kinds in Socrates' two attempts at defining *eros* doesn't seem to merit his rather high-strung description of dialectic. Now, this praise may of course be understood as partly ironical, as Griswold seems to take it.¹⁹ The point would then be indirect, namely to show that the technical aspect of philosophy, division and collection, is at best a tool, but, as a tool, inferior to the living dialogue characteristic of philosophy. I find this somewhat unconvincing. I grant that it may be difficult to understand what division and collection is meant to do, but it seems clear to me, from what I would call the 'tone' of the so-called later dialogues, that Plato did indeed regard the ability to see a scattered manifold, whatever is meant by this, towards a unity, and in turn to see this unity as composed of a manifold, as highly important to philosophy. To put this differently, the ability to see likeness and difference in one and the same 'look', as it were, without focusing abstractly on one aspect or the other (the question whether the philosopher is like or unlike the sophist springs to mind), is, I believe, of crucial importance to Plato.

In lack of a better explanation of why Plato has Socrates describe this ability in such positive terms in the *Phaedrus*, I would therefore like to make the following suggestion. What if what Socrates describes by collection and division is something else than the ability to define something, i.e. *eros*, by genus proximum and differentia specifica? What if the myth of the soul that Socrates gives in his second speech is intimately connected with dialectic, that is, with the ability to perform collections and division?

As I pointed out at the beginning of the paper, dialectic consists, according to what Socrates says in the 265d-66b passage, in the ability to see one idea or form (*mian idea*) through many and to be able to cut this up according to other forms (*eidē*). Now, in the palinode, where justice and virtue, among other things, are

mentioned, we never find them referred to by the terms *idea* or *eidos*. Rather, they are referred to as the things that are, *to onta* (247e) or the things outside heaven, *ta exō tou ouranou* (247c).

On the other hand, at 246a3-6, Socrates refers to the form of the soul as *mian idean*. When he then goes on to give the likeness of the soul, i.e. that it is like a charioteer and black and white horse grown into one, he identifies each of these 'elements', at 253c7-9, as the *eidē* of the soul. Perhaps it is this part of the myth, rather than a procedure of dividing natural kinds, that Socrates is talking about when he describes dialectic? The idea of identifying the steps of collection and division with the myth about the soul seems to gain further support by a later passage, namely 270d-e, where *eidē* is also used to describe the parts of anything that isn't simple (*haploun*) but many-formed, as, for instance, the human soul. Finally, at 271d the term of *eidos* is used to describe two things, on the one hand the elements of the soul, on the other the different kinds of souls that result, presumably, from the choice souls make of following different gods. Perhaps what Socrates is talking about in the passage on dialectic is thus a specific ability to look at human souls, characteristic of philosophically minded people.

Let me try to give a sketch of how this would connect the myth of the soul with dialectic, *mythos* with *logos*. On the reading suggested here, the one form described in the first step of dialectic as what is seen or collected from a dispersed manifold would be the one soul common to all human beings. This soul is essentially characterized by movement or erotic striving towards something and this is, in some form or other, characteristic for all men. But *eros* is no simple or gentle force, leading all men to insight or contemplation of the 'hyperuranian beings'.²⁰ Indeed, *eros* can direct different men in different directions, partly, one assumes, due to natural inclination, partly (and more importantly) due to upbringing or education (*paideia*). A way to point this out is by giving a mythical account of the soul, according to which there are different elements in it, so that the unity or entity "soul" is shown to be a complex unity filled with tension and strife. This can be regarded as one way of dividing the unity seen in the first step of dialectical activity. A second kind of division can be found within the myth when Socrates goes on to explain how different souls choose to follow different gods (246e ff, 252c ff).²¹ To me it seems reasonable to suppose that this is another way of saying that the first picture we get of the soul, as an erotic being, which is somehow a unity characterised by plurality and tension, is 'abstract'. It is abstract in so far as soul as 'incarnated' comes in many different forms due to the fact that the relations in which the 'elements' of the soul stand to each other may differ greatly, resulting in different 'Weltanschauungen' or conceptions of what goal one should strive towards.

I grant that this interpretation has some drawbacks. For instance, one may suppose that *idea* is simply the term Socrates uses at 265 for something, anything

when regarded as a whole, whereas *eidōs* is the term he uses to designate a part. If that is so, it is only natural that these terms are to be found in the earlier description of the relationship between the form of the soul and its parts, but this does not mean that what Socrates describes as dialectic is specifically preoccupied with the soul. A related objection would be that dialectic is supposed to be a universal method. If it is, one may grant that dialectic is not simply a method for dividing natural kinds, but can also be used to investigate things that are not ideas, natural kinds or whatever one wants to call them, as for instance the human soul. But one could then say that this is merely a special case which becomes important in the *Phaedrus* because Socrates' speeches are on love. A partial answer to these objections can, I believe, be found in the second part of the dialogue. In the final part of this paper, I will therefore turn to the question how dialectic and rhetoric relate to each other and how this connects with the myth about the soul.

III

The general drift of the argument in the second part of the *Phaedrus* seems to be the following: rhetoric cannot be a *technē* unless it is founded on a real understanding of the subject it discusses. In order to speak or write beautifully, one must understand what one speaks or writes about. And this insight is supposedly arrived at through adequate philosophizing, i.e. through the exercise of dialectic. Before I elaborate on how this connects with my suggestion that dialectic, as described in the *Phaedrus*, is primarily concerned with the soul rather than being a universal method for acquiring knowledge, I have to say something about Socrates' claim that philosophy can transform rhetoric into a *technē*. For what he says seems to pose a problem for my suggestion.

The drift of Socrates' argument, founding rhetoric on philosophy, may seem like a typical Platonic move. Socrates suggests that if one is interested in rhetoric, one should really care for philosophy and that the truth is more important than opinions, and these suggestions are directed at Phaedrus, in order to turn his unlimited love for speeches into a love for dialectic. In other words, Plato has Socrates make a kind of protreptic argument. But what he actually says, when discussing rhetoric with Phaedrus, is not so obviously Platonic. For it may seem rather surprising that dialectic should be able to transform rhetoric into a real art, i.e. a *technē*, instead of being a mere knack, *tribē* (260e). In the *Gorgias*, at least, Socrates claims quite forcefully that rhetoric cannot be a *technē*. To state Socrates' objection in a perhaps oversimplified way, a *technē* must be something that can be taught to others, and it must have a specific field of objects. Rhetoric seems to violate both principles. It resembles a knack more than a science built on teachable principles, on the one hand. On the other hand, since it claims to be

able to induce belief about any given subject, it seems impossible to determine a specific field of objects for it. This is what Socrates now seems to recant.²² Rhetoric may indeed be termed a *technē* after all, if, that is, it has real knowledge of its subject as its foundation. But since Socrates is to claim that it is the art of dialectic that gives this kind of knowledge, and since rhetoric seems to deal with everything, dialectic seems, after all, to be a universal method which can deliver knowledge on any given subject.

Before we accept this conclusion, however, we may stop and ask why Plato should believe that one method, a kind of *mathesis universalis*, could ever be able to give man knowledge of everything. For it is not only in the *Gorgias* that we find arguments depending on the notion that an art, a *technē*, is concerned with one specific field of objects only. Such arguments can be found throughout the *corpus platonicum*. In light of this, it may be worth noting that Socrates' conception of rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* is radically different from the one espoused by Gorgias, a fact that Phaedrus at once points out. For by rhetoric, Socrates does not simply understand the ability to temporarily produce convictions in others in a law-court or at a political assembly. Rather, he regards it as a "way of directing [or leading] the soul [*psychagōgia*] by means of speech", not only in public but also in private (261a). This notion of rhetoric, which Socrates repeats at 271d, casts interesting light on what Socrates apparently understands by rhetoric turned into real art.

Let us therefore take a closer look at it. The ability to lead souls is first described, at 261e, as the art of being able to deceive others as well as to detect others who try to deceive one. According to Socrates, deception relies on two things. First of all, it relies on the fact that certain things that aren't alike, look alike. If anyone is to convince someone else that a course of action that is really harmful is good, that course of action must at least appear good. But this means that the art of deception requires knowledge of which things look alike and which do not, since, according to Socrates, it is only possible to deceive someone about things that differ little from each other (261e). It is no good to try to convince someone that a butcher is in fact a sophist. If someone were to depict Socrates as a sophist, however...

It is in order to explain this point that Socrates, at 263a-b, introduces the distinction between words, the meaning of which are evident to all, and words the meaning of which are contested, i.e. words where people do not agree about what they mean, either with others or indeed with themselves. Apparently, contested terms are names designating things that are difficult to understand, or words that have a somewhat blurry connotation or are disputed for some reason or other. The examples Socrates gives are the good, the just and, of course, *eros*. So, in order to lead people's souls, i.e. in order to deceive them about these things, knowledge is required, and not only a knowledge of which terms are contested

and which are not, but also of what these contested terms really refer to, i.e. what the essence of the contested term is. At least this seems to be the point when Socrates, at 262a9-II, asks Phaedrus whether it "is ... really possible for someone who doesn't know what each thing truly is to detect a similarity." So the ability to lead a soul of someone, through deception, requires real knowledge about the subject matter one wishes to deceive someone about as well as knowledge of which things it resembles. It is not quite clear from the passage what this knowledge consists in, but the fact that Socrates immediately contrasts it with the chasing of mere opinions (262c) clearly suggests that by knowledge Socrates means real, substantive understanding. Socrates' claim must therefore be that only the man who really knows what justice, the good and such things are, i.e. have an understanding of their essence or being, and how they differ from and relate to other things, is able to deceive others. It seems fair to claim that it is this knowledge that dialectic will supposedly give the rhetorician.

How does this relate to my problem about the universality of dialectic? Well, it is at least clear that Socrates claims that dialectic can help the rhetorician to acquire understanding of only about a limited number of 'objects', such as the just and the good and *eros* (which is, we should remember, essentially connected with the human soul). This may of course be regarded as a consequence of the claim that real deception is only possible about such notions but it seems – I grant that this is not compelling – that Socrates is suggesting that what he calls disputed terms is what dialectic deal with. But even if I am right about this, we seem to be faced by a number of other paradoxes as a consequence of Socrates' claim that dialectic can deliver a foundation for an art of rhetoric.

First of all, Socrates' strategy seems to imply that a man like Lysias or for that matter Gorgias, who only relies on what people in general believe about a subject matter, who merely chase opinions, are not able to deceive anyone at all! Only the philosopher is able to deceive his fellow men. So again, what Socrates seems to say is this: look my fine fellows, Gorgias, Lysias and Phaedrus, if you want to be able to deceive someone about something, you need to turn your attention to philosophy.

This can of course be read as another protreptic argument. But even if we do that, Socrates claim is truly surprising. For it implies that Lysias is not really able to deceive anyone. But why is Socrates then so interested in discussing his speech with Phaedrus and why does he end his palinode with the prayer that Lysias should turn to philosophy in order that Phaedrus may stop wandering in two directions (257b)? Are we to conclude that it is Socrates' speeches that are really deceptive and that this deception is founded on his understanding of *eros*? Socrates suggests as much at 265a and I am inclined to think that this is how Plato meant us to understand the passage.

But if this is so, we seem to be faced with a second dilemma. We would perhaps like to say that it must be Socrates' first speech that was deceptive (being, as Socrates said at 242d, a horrible (*deinos*) speech on *eros*), whereas his second must be the true one. But this seems to be ruled out. For at 266a Socrates claims that the first speech found "a sort of love that can be called 'left-handed,' which it correctly [or with justice] denounced." If left-handed love is rightly denounced, and we have no good reasons for believing that it isn't, why should we regard Socrates' first speech as deceptive? We may then wonder whether it is the second speech which is deceptive.²³ We may ask: has Socrates been trying to deceive Phaedrus into philosophy? By telling his myth about the soul? Is the myth specifically designed as a noble lie about the nature of *eros*, intended to turn the rather simple-minded Phaedrus away from Lysian-styled rhetoric towards philosophy? And is Socrates only able to compose his myth by having a good understanding of the nature of *eros* as well as of the nature of the human soul in general and of the soul of Phaedrus in particular? This reading may seem to be exaggerated, and I am not entirely sure whether this is the conclusion to draw. Nevertheless, I think it is worthwhile to consider as a serious suggestion and that there is textual support for it. This will, however, leave us with a final paradox.

Through a – perhaps somewhat ironical – argument, running from 270a-271d, Socrates picks up on the notion of rhetoric as a real art, characterized as a leading of souls. It is here defined analogous to medicine and is said to "be able ... to supply a soul with reasons and customary rules that will impart to it the convictions and virtues we want." (270b5-9). So, like Gorgian rhetoric, true rhetoric imparts certain convictions to its 'victims', though, we may suppose, it differs from it by the facts that the effect is supposed to be of a more permanent nature, that its goal is 'noble' insofar as it is to install virtue in its listener and that it is carried out in private, not in public. Since this kind of rhetoric, like all rhetoric, is directed towards human beings, Socrates at 270e states that it must "demonstrate precisely the essential nature of that to which speeches are to be applied. And that, surely, is the soul." What is meant by such a precise demonstration has been made clear a few lines above, at 270d. To determine the nature of anything, Socrates there claims, one must first determine whether the object is simple or complex. If it is simple, one should then try to determine the power of the object. If, "on the other hand, it takes many forms, we must enumerate them all and, as we did in the simple case, investigate how each is naturally able to act upon what and how it has a natural disposition to be acted upon by what." A little later, at 271a4-7, Socrates can therefore conclude that anyone who wishes to "teach the art of rhetoric seriously will, first, describe the soul with absolute precision and enable us to understand what it is: whether it is one and homogeneous by nature or takes many forms". After that he will have to determine what it does and what it suffers. Finally, he will need to know

each kind of logos, in order to understand which types of speeches will appear convincing to which kinds of souls.

Apart from the clear allusion to Socrates' initial question pertaining to his own nature, this passage is indeed a clear reminder of the content of the palinode. The myth of the soul, describing the essence and the form of the soul, seems to be what we need in order to turn rhetoric into art. So perhaps it is not so absurd to say that dialectic, as described in the *Phaedrus*, is not a universal method which enables us to acquire knowledge, but is really about soul, nor to say that Socrates' second speech delivers knowledge of the soul and that this knowledge enables him to deceive Phaedrus, where the deception must be understood, of course, as a noble lie, implanting reasons and customary rules into Phaedrus, i. e. giving him the convictions and virtues that Socrates want.

The paradox this gives us, however, can be spelled out as two serious problems facing this otherwise edifying conclusion. The first concerns the action or drama of the dialogue, the second its argument.²⁴ If we are to regard the palinode as Socrates' rhetorical, or perhaps poetic, attempt to turn the soul of Phaedrus towards philosophy, which at the same time describes the knowledge which enables him to make this speech, we may wonder why it apparently has no effect on Phaedrus. Phaedrus does not at any point comment positively on the content of what Socrates has said. Nor does anything in the second part of the dialogue suggest that Phaedrus has changed his interest from rhetoric to philosophy.²⁵

The second problem is that the palinode itself seems to make Socrates' proposed philosophical rhetoric impossible. For if it is true that it is impossible for a human being to say what form the soul has, if all we can do is to say what it is like, the idea that rhetoric must state with utmost precision what the soul is, how many types of it there are, how they are affected and by what kinds of speeches, how many kinds of speeches there really are (as can be seen from the passage 271d-272b, the list is very long), we may begin to suspect, as Phaedrus seems to do, that the task is impossible. Could Socrates' failure at turning Phaedrus to philosophy be due to the fact that he cannot really know who Phaedrus is? And if so – we should remember that Socrates begins the dialogue by saying that if he has forgotten his Phaedrus, he has forgotten himself (228a, cf. also 236c) – does this mean that Socrates does in fact not really know who he is?

Notes

1. As P. Friedländer, *Platon III*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin (1964), 222 points out, this was already a question discussed by the ancient Platonists; cf. Hermias' report on this issue. See also R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedrus*, CUP: Cambridge (1972), 8-9.

2. This is really just spelling out what was already implicit in Lysias' speech, see especially 231a: *epeidan tēs epithymias pausōntai* and 233c: *ouch hyp' erōtōs hētōmenos all' emautou kratōn*.
3. Hachforth (1972), 134.
4. This is basically in accordance with the view of dialectic that Cornford expresses in his commentary on the *Sophist*, which he, by relying on Aristotle's testimony about Socrates, contrasts with the latter's method of induction. Whereas Socratic *epagōgē* leads to one idea, the definition of which is supposed to satisfy the Socratic *ti estin* question, Plato's later dialectical method is characterized by a two-fold operation, 1) a collection of scattered terms into a single *genus* which is then to be 2) divided "in a downward process from that genus to the definition of the species", F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, Dover Publications: Mineola, 184. According to Cornford, this is due to a change in Plato's interest. Whereas Socratic induction "contemplates a single form", Plato's later "attention is ... transferred to ... the relations of Forms among themselves", p. 185.
5. N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist*, CUP: Cambridge 1999, 77.
6. Ch. Iber, *Platon Sophistes (kommentar)*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M. (2007), 223 [daß die Begriffe einander über- und untergeordnete Gattungen und Arten sind].
7. This has been emphasized by many commentators Cf. for instance J. Stenzel, *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik von Sokrates zu Aristoteles*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt (1961), 106 ff.
8. See Gomes-Lobo's criticism of Stenzel's attempt to make a unified reading of *Sophist*, 253a-e, found in "Plato's Description of Dialectic in the *Sophist*" in *Phronesis*, 1977.
9. E. Heitsch, *Platon Werke III, 4 Phaidros (Übersetzung und Kommentar)*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (1997), 137. A similar suggestion is made by A. Nehamas & P. Woodruff, *Plato: Phaedrus (translation, introduction and notes)*, Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis (1995), who concludes that Plato, through Socrates' second speech, really says goodbye to his former theory of Forms, which he by now regards as no more than a good story, whereas true philosophy "consists in the austere practice of collection and division".
10. This principle is not only in accordance with what he later says about the necessity of knowing what one speaks about if rhetoric is to become at *technē* (262b-c), a knowledge which he there claims that dialectic is able to deliver, it also seems to match the procedure which the Eleatic stranger proposes in the *Sophist*, when he suggests that he and Theaetetus should move, through discourse, from having merely a name in common to a shared understanding of the matter they discuss, i.e. the sophist (*Soph.* 218c-d).
11. I cannot enter into the discussion of the so-called Socratic fallacy (so termed by P. Geach) in this paper. Suffice it to say that I find that there is a great difference between claiming that one must know what something is in order to be sure that the 'attributes' one believes belong to that something does in fact belong to it, and claiming that one cannot say anything about anything before one has defined it. It is in my opinion only the former view that can be ascribed to Socrates in Plato's dialogues and this view certainly does not exclude the use of examples or ordinary beliefs when searching for a definition of something.
12. For this notion of the power of dialectic, see also *Rep.* 454a.
13. Cf. note 11.
14. Cf. J. Klein, *Plato's trilogy*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago (1977), 5. If we accept the sixth letter as genuine, we can see that Plato, at 323d, claims that playfulness is the sister of seriousness.
15. In this paper, I cannot go into any detailed exposition of the speeches. What follows is merely a sketch of how one might connect the content of Socrates' second speech, the so-called *palinode*, with the procedure of collection and division.
16. In the short interlude between Socrates' first and his second speech, Socrates does not seem to be complaining that his first speech was wrong due to faulty divisions, but rather that his speech, as

well as Lysias', were terrible (*deinos*, 242d) since they missed what *eros* was, in determining him as something bad. One could of course argue that the fault is exactly due to a failure in making an adequate analysis of the nature of *eros* which is the problem of the two speeches, and that the *palinode* is to remedy this by giving us a conceptual analysis of *eros*. My respond to this would be that the 'conceptual analysis' we find in the *palinode* derives its main force from the mythical account Socrates gives of the soul. Put differently, the procedure of division cannot of itself show us that *eros* is in fact a kind of divine madness, since the 'proof' for this rests on the account of the soul as self-motion.

17. In this I follow Ch. Griswold, *Self-knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*, Pennsylvania State University Press (1988), 88 ff. See also K. Sorter, *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues*, University of California Press (1994), 43.
18. This picture of the soul as movement and a sort of middle-being is not only found in the *Phaedrus*, but also in the account of the soul in the *Symposium* and in the tenth book of the *Laws*. Indeed, this very point is used by the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* to argue that, besides unchanging ideas, soul must be counted among the things that really are, if one is to be able to explain the phenomena of cognition (*Soph.* 248d ff.). Even in the *Phaedo*, where the erotic striving of the soul (and hence also the soul's complexity) is downplayed due to the subject matter of the dialogue, the soul is never said to be an idea, but only to be most *like* (*homoioteron*) an idea (79b). None of these passages are conclusive evidence, I admit, but I believe that it is easier to make sense of them, as well as of the notion of *paideia* as a kind of forming and changing of souls, if one doesn't suppose that there is an idea of the soul.
19. Griswold (1988), 175.
20. The picture in the *palinode* is rather complex. On the one hand it is said that no soul that hasn't had any contact with true reality can be incarnated as a human being (249b). It would seem to follow from this that it is natural for all human beings to strive to remember these ideas (or hyperuranian beings) which they have seen in their 'pre-incarnated' existence. On the other hand it is more than suggested that it is only a very small group of men who ever, through confrontation with earthly beauty, start to strive for a re-collection or remembrance of true reality.
21. A third 'division' can be found in the description of different types of human beings found at 248d ff, where the idea is that people are incarnated as different types as a result of the difference in the amount of knowledge they acquired in the 'pre-incarnated' status. If and how this is meant to be connected with the idea that different souls follow different gods does not seem clear to me. In fact, one can get the impression that Socrates in his second speech playfully imitates Lysias' speech by stating the same point more than once, in different wording, and even by stating his points in a rather random manner. This should go some way to make one suspicious of Socrates' claim that the main point about his two speeches was the good order by which they proceeded...
22. To some commentators, this is an indication of Plato's development (supposing that the *Phaedrus* is later than the *Gorgias*), so that the *Phaedrus* represents Plato's more mature understanding of rhetoric. Apart from the problems connected with establishing a chronology by means of which one can trace a development in Plato's thought, I find this reading implausible for reasons that will become clear in what follows.
23. In contrast with what he says about his first speech in the summary at 266a-b, Socrates never says that the praise of divine madness was just.
24. To borrow an expression from L. Strauss.
25. This is strongly emphasised in D. Hyland, *The Question of Beauty*, Indiana University Press (2008).

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